**Lawrence Kohlberg’s Stages of Moral Development and the Linus Project**

Lawrence Kohlberg was an American psychologist and professor that created a well recognized theory of moral development. Kohlberg theorized that there are six stages of moral development, with those six stages occurring in three levels. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>) The first level is Preconventional Morality, the second level is Conventional Morality, and the third level is Postconventional Morality. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>) According to Kohlberg’s theory, there are two stages of moral development at each of the three levels. His theory also states that his research showed that an individual must advance through the stages one at a time, and skipping a stage does not occur. (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml)

Kohlberg called the first level pre-conventional, and it contains two different stages. ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml) The first stage, punishment and obedience, has to do with the thought that every action has a result. For example, a person in this stage will attempt to do the right thing because they might get punished, and they know that negative behavior will result in negative consequences. ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) Most infants and small children fall into this stage. The next stage at the pre-conventional level, called individualism and exchange, deals with some of the same ideas as the first stage, but advances beyond just punishment. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>) Individuals begin to look for rewards that serve their own needs. An example of this is, “you scratch my back and I’ll scratch yours,” or “what’s in it for me.” ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) Both of the first level stages deal with doing what is right to avoid a punishment or receive a benefit.

The second level of moral development moves beyond the individual and begins to involve society and the laws in society. There are also two stages in the second or conventional level of moral development. The first stage, referred to as the interpersonal relationship/conformity stage, involves doing things are acceptable to your family, peers and society. (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml) This stage is focused on the desire for others to view you as “good” or “nice.” ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) The fourth stage in Kohlberg’s theory, the second stage of the conventional level, is called the law and order stage. ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) This stage involves an individual’s morality being determined by the law and the rules of society. Respect for authority is important at this stage and rules, laws and authority are rarely questioned. (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml) People who are at this stage often are frustrated with people at more advanced stages because they see them as rule breakers. (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml) Kohlberg believed that most people did not consistently advance beyond stage four. (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml)

Finally, the third and final level of Kohlberg’s theory of moral development is the post-conventional stage, where an individual tends to think out of the box, and will do what they think is ethically right, even if it means breaking a law. The first stage of level three is known as the stage of social contracts and individual rights, and in this stage you start to value your personal morals more than society’s morals. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>) Individuals in this stage still view rules as necessary for society, but view the rules and laws as being changeable when necessary. ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) However, the change needs to occur within the rules set by society. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>) The American Constitution would fall into this stage as the laws of America are established in the Constitution, but the ability and a way to change them is included when necessary. (www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml) The final stage of the post-conventional level, and of all the levels, is known as the universal principles stage. ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) This last stage of moral development theorizes that an individual’s morals are based on a set of ethical principles developed by that person based upon equality and justice, even if they conflict with the laws of society. (<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>) People in this stage are willing to break laws if the laws do not agree with that person’s morals. ([www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)) Good examples of people in this stage are the patriots during the American Revolution, Daniel in the Bible, and Ho Chi Minh and the communists. All of these people believed in something that society did not believe in, and all of these people had to risk their lives and/or money in order to follow their morals.

The Project Linus activity could fall into several, if not all, of the categories depending on the point of view of the person involved. If a person is doing the project only because they will get punished for making a bad grade on the assignment, then they could fall into stage one. If a person is making their blanket only in order to receive a good grade, then they could fall into stage two. If a person is only doing the project work because everyone else is doing it and they do not want to feel that they have let down their peer group, then they fall into stage three. If a person is only completing a blanket because they are following the rules set by the teacher, then they could fall into stage four. Stage five or six could also be considered for someone who would do the project even if it were not assigned because they felt it was morally right. I believe that Project Linus itself probably falls into stage five as it exists in America. Since the Project work is not against the rules of our society, we do not know whether it could fall into stage six. However, the Project Linus work does go beyond just following the rules of society and asks for communities and people to get involved to help others who are in need. To me, this would put Project Linus in the post-conventional stage.

**Graphic Organizer**

Intro- Kohlberg is a physiologist and professor, and he theorized six stages of moral development

#1- The two levels of the pre-conventional stage

#2- The two levels of the conventional stage

#3- The two levels of the post-conventional stage

#4- The Project Linus activity could fall into all the stages, depending on the person’s morals. Project Linus in America falls in stage 5.

**Bibliography**

[www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml](http://www.aggelia.com/htdocs/kohlberg.shtml)

<http://psychology.about.com/od/developmentalpsychology/a/kohlberg.htm>

[www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html](http://www.xenodochy.org/ex/lists/moraldev.html)